



COMPARATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH GROUP

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
405 HILGARD AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024-1521

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Dr. Simon Schwartzman, Diretor Cientifico
Nucleo de Pesquisas sobre Ensino Superior
da Universidade de Sao Paulo
Rua do Antiteatro 181
Sao Paulo, SP Brasil

Dear Simon:

Following upon our meetings with you and other members of NUPES on March 26-28, 1990, and on behalf of the other members of the Advisory Board, I would like to submit the following report. As you will recognize, these written comments closely parallel the items we offered orally at the concluding session on the 28th. Our thoughts fall into six main categories:

(1) The missions of NUPES. We recognize that NUPES wishes to develop basic knowledge on Brazilian higher education and to do so in a comparative fashion. A commitment to basic research is primary. However, the NUPES staff is also deeply involved in public policy and is committed to an ongoing active role in a broad range of issues, especially in Brazilian higher education. This second mission is inescapable, even highly desirable. It is clearly the commitment that from day to day will very likely absorb the time, resources, and imagination of the senior staff. Its demands are immediate, often compelling. Thus, the carrying-out of these two primary missions raises as a problem of first importance the need to achieve balance by protecting research time and enhancing the capability to do research. This concern leads directly to our second point.

(2) The NUPES staff. We believe NUPES needs to build a small staff of young researchers from among post-graduate students, post-docs, and junior faculty. An augmented cadre is needed within which some members are fully invested in research tasks. We suggest that such internal consolidation should be given high priority.

(3) Coherence of the NUPES agenda. We recommend that the senior staff seek to define a coherent agenda for research and deliberation that will lead over time to a perceivable institutional character. There is so much that needs to be done, so much that can be done. NUPES will be

subjected to strong fragmenting forces; its year-by-year sequence of projects and involvements could readily resemble a drunk lurching down the street and clinging first to one lamppost then another. Self-definition is needed as a guard against sheer opportunism. Thus it seems quite important to begin to sort out (subject to later review and alteration), what is central and what is not. What will be the central thrust? What will NUPES stand for, in the eyes of others elsewhere in the country and the world as well as in the understandings of the staff, five years from now? Coherent agenda definition ranks with cadre-building as a fundamental concern worthy of your best thought.

(4) Outcomes of the NUPES program. It seems clear indeed from your first efforts that NUPES will attempt to reach quite different audiences and constituencies. A variety of channels of communication and modes of expression will be needed. Using the outcomes of your research, you will be seeking to reach basic researchers, institutional researchers, university administrators, ministerial officials, politicians, and the attentive public. Geographically you will be reaching from Sao Paulo to audiences in many distant countries and international agencies. Hence it will be helpful to consciously differentiate books, articles, working papers, local releases, and various oral presentations as instruments of communication with audiences that have quite different needs in relation to your work and quite different capacities to absorb your "output."

(5) The NUPES capacity to train. It would be easy to overlook the training function: one research center after another in the study of education has done so. But it seems essential that NUPES have two forms of training in mind. The first and most essential is to train a few young people at doctoral or postdoctoral levels to be the next generation of higher education researchers in Brazil and Latin America. The field is small, the number need not be large. Three to five newly-minted researchers in a five-year period would surely be a major contribution, especially with high quality and placement in positions of future research leadership. The second form of training is short training sessions, e.g., one to three weeks, for researchers and administrators that would upgrade research and critical thought on higher education issues in Brazil, and Latin America more widely.

(6) The location of NUPES at the University. It is of course important that NUPES have an organizational niche within your host university that favors the accomplishment of your dual missions. It seems advisable not to be part of the Rector's office nor part of a department. A niche defined as a separate research institute that is part of a complex of such institutes seems to offer the openness and flexibility that would be most favorable to your cause.

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NUPES promises to be the most important research center in Latin American for the study of higher education. You already possess major talent, for both research and for exercising voice in public policy. You already have significant international ties with counterparts in Europe, the United States, and other countries in Latin America. NUPES is positioned to play a leadership role in building a network of Latin American research centers and individual researchers that will further the understanding of the evermore complex and opaque institutional domain that we call higher education.

We believe you have made a significant and appropriate beginning. We look forward to further contact with you and to the opportunity to observe the evolving character of NUPES as your efforts unfold during the next several years.

Sincerely,

Burton R. Clark / ps

Burton R. Clark
Allan M. Cartter Professor of
Higher Education and Sociology

BRC:ps

xc: Ulrich Teichler
Jose Joaquin Brunner
Jose Arthur Giannotti